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SOCIALIST DISCUSSION JOURNAL  
TOWARDS BETTER UNDERSTANDING

# FORUM

## Do We Need the Dialectic?

### I—Hegel

Marx declared Hegel was on his head. One wonders why Marx did not leave him there, for that is Hegel's logical position. It is a Marxist legend that Marx, by looking at Hegel wrong side down, was able to turn the dialectic right side up. This is like saying that by looking at an up-ended sow one can tell the pedigree of a pig.

Some of the confusion which has arisen over the alleged relation between Hegel and Marx is due to the fact that many Marxists have attributed to Hegel positions he never held. If Hegel was an idealist he was never one in the classic philosophic tradition. He did not oppose mind to matter in the way Berkeley and Kant had done. For Hegel the known object was as real as the mind which perceived it—although actually what he meant by that, we shall see later. Mind and matter, said Hegel, were simply aspects of a self-existent realm of being which is perpetually renewing itself in accordance with its own inherent laws.

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Now, in pre-Hegelian philosophic circles mind and matter had got so far apart that they were hardly on speaking terms. Hegel not only undertook to reconcile them into an eternal and indissoluble union, but acted as best man at the ceremony. He even wrote the Wedding March in the form of the "Phenomenologies."

This self-constituted realm of being, *vide* Hegel, was the entire cosmic process. It purports to be a timeless order of things, of which history is a temporal phase. According to Hegel it is directed by a rational principle. Hence his statement—all that is rational is real and all that is real is rational. This suggests that everything is the outcome of some logical sequence and so whatever is, is right. While to the non-Hegelian poverty, crises, unemployment, wars and even the threat of total extinction may seem major social mishaps, *à la* Hegel they are all part of Reason's plan. We have heard these Hegelian echoes reverberate through FORUM via the instrumentality of F. Evans. One can detect, then, fatalistic overtones in the Hegelian symphony.

Actually the statement, all that is rational is real and *vice versa*, is a tautology. It simply asserts that what is, is. Everything must fit into a logical developing whole, and even when men's actions seem to refute any suggestion that the actual and the rational are identical, Hegel blandly assures us that the conflicting and arbitrary ways of men are but the means by which the logical process secures its inscrutable ends.

Hegel's system is a teleological spiritual idealism; according to him this self-existent realm of being is identifiable with the absolute idea, or God. It thus comprehends all thought and experience. Everything which is and everything which has happened constitute aspects of the absolute. Only the whole or Reality is completely real. What has been and is taking place are but partial manifestations of the whole. Nevertheless, as more of the cosmic process is revealed, newer and higher approximations to absolute

truth emerge and in the understanding of that process the world comes to absolute self-consciousness and manifests in God. Hegel's philosophy is a theology, albeit a rational one. Indeed, Hegel's writings suggest at times that he had secured the sole rights to publish the memoirs of God in serial form, where every instalment would be better than the last.

It has been argued that because Hegel saw events as imperfect manifestations of the Absolute Idea, on which no final judgment can be pronounced, he was at bottom a relativist. Nothing could be further from the truth so far as Hegel is concerned. Relative truth, although it may in part be derived from antecedent conditions, is dependent on time and place. Hegel's categories are, however, eternal categories and so independent of temporal phases. Everything that was, is and will be are aspects of an Absolute Mind achieving absolute self-consciousness. All events are the exteriorisation of the absolute, including the minds which comprehend them. If relative truth is dependent on time, then time is something to which Hegel cannot grant reality. To do so would be to expose him to the absurdity of admitting that the absolute and eternal undergoes real changes in the finite and temporal. Hegel tried to get round this difficulty by referring to time as the external and alienated form in which the absolute self appears. Only nature, said Hegel, was finite and so subject to time. "Truth, Idea and Spirit are eternal."

It might, however, be contended that whatever the defects of his ideal logical system which crippled, cabined and confined his dialectic method within the Absolute, it was a genuine contribution to our intellectual heritage. Was it not this dialectic the method of which Marx, after "inverting" it, was able to make such great use? Before commenting on this it may be as well to enumerate briefly the characteristics of the dialectic.

The Greeks had a word for it. In fact it was their word. Originally it meant the art

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of discussion with the object of getting at the truth by exposing the contradictions in an argument. Or, to put it another way, the pros and cons of two opposing propositions could be so exhausted by mutual discussion as to eliminate the errors in each and, retaining what is true in both, synthesise them into a higher truth or unity. It was Plato who gave the name dialectic to the method which arrives at an understanding of the nature of ideas. Plato held that ideas alone are real, and material things a reflection of them. Hegel, as has been seen, held that the Absolute Idea was reality and that nature, and through nature the mind of man, were aspects of it. Everything was real because everything was part of the Absolute Idea or Spirit. In this way did Hegel achieve his celebrated Monism, or the oneness of all things.

Plato regarded contradictions as obstacles to arriving at truth. Hegel, on the other hand, saw contradictions as the crux of every situation. He maintained that the opposition set up by these contradictions constituted the driving force of development.

To begin, Hegel enumerates a number of ideas or categories, such as quantity, quality, form, content, causality, substance, existence, which although derived from Plato's universe of forms are considered not statically but dynamically. Indeed, it is the dynamic character of the concepts which constitute Hegel's "rational principle" and also appear under the generic heading of Reality or the Absolute, which is the genesis of everything.

Hegel having postulated a dynamic or a dialectic inter-connection between his categories, his job was to show how they got into movement. Now, said Hegel, if we look at any situation from a merely formal standpoint we shall see only a one sided development. Scrutiny will reveal, however, that another side is involved in the process. This will set up a reaction between the "opposing" sides and a reconciliation of its contradictions will be effected. To state it another way, it can be said that every situation contains two mutually incompatible but nevertheless equally essential aspects. As a result of this mutually contradictory process opposition is generated within the situation, and because each aspect constitutes a denial or frustration of the development of the other, disequilibrium ensues. This situation can only be resolved by these conflicting elements being fused into another situation, in which certain aspects of both have been denied and other aspects affirmed or retained in a new and higher synthesis. But this synthesis will in the course of its development reveal its inherently unstable structure, and as the result of its conflicting elements yield to another and higher synthesis. In this way will reality proceed until absolute self-consciousness is achieved. Then we can go on for ever contemplating our navels without noting any contradictions.

Dialectics may be defined as an exposition of the unity of opposites. It maintains that the nature of reality is essentially contra-

dictory. It goes on to state, however, that these contradictions can be shown to exist in unity. The polarity of magnetism and the negative plates of an electric cell are the most familiar examples of these polar opposites within a unity.

Then there is what is known as the law of the negation of the negation, which has already been dealt with. It represents phases of development in a given process. It comprises the well known triadic formula: thesis, antithesis, synthesis. The thesis may be regarded as the original situation which in the course of its development exhibits internal instability as the result of its inherent contradictions. It is replaced by the antithesis which attempts to overcome these contradictions. That is the first negation. But the antithesis in attempting to eliminate these contradictions also breaks down and produces a synthesis. This is the second negation. And so we get the negation of the negation.

Finally there is another dialectical "law" which claims to explain the appearance of new qualities and the results of their emergence. Change according to this law takes place by imperceptible quantitative additions until a limit is reached beyond which a thing cannot undergo variations and yet remain the same. This is known as the transformation of quantity into quality. Typical examples of this are when water turns to steam at 100°C. and into ice at 0°C.

Now there are two claims made by dialecticians, both Hegelian and Marxist—the latter having for the paternity of their views no less a person than Engels himself. The first claim is that the dialectic is a legitimate procedure of investigation yielding important truths. Secondly, it is a methodological procedure for establishing evidence. If that is so, one may ask why no great scientific discoveries (or even worthwhile ones) have been made *via* these canons of interpretation, and why the annals of science make no reference to this methodological principle—or is it just a bourgeois conspiracy?

Again, there is a striking ambivalence in the claims of the exponents of the dialectic. First it is held as a canon of interpretation, and secondly as the actual behaviour of natural phenomena. On such an assumption scientific method and "natural laws" are identical. This, of course, is a denial of the truth-finding character of science and the disciplines and procedure which are integral to it. Soviet dialecticians and their obedient echoes in England and elsewhere follow Engels in proclaiming that nature is dialectical and human thought follows it and is hence dialectical itself. In that case men have always been dialecticians, and so no special case can be made for it as a superior form of thinking. Again, if thought follows the dialectical operations of nature we are back to eighteenth century materialism, where nature was regarded as something eternally given and the mind but reflected, copied, or photographed it. This kind of materialism was decisively repudiated by

Marx. Unfortunately, Lenin (with the aid of Engels) resuscitated it, and it has now become enshrined in the metaphysics of dialectical materialism.

Such views, however, would not be inconsistent with the philosophy of Hegel. For him thought and the object of thought, *i.e.*, nature, were all aspects of an indivisible, self-existent realm of being—reality or the absolute. All parts of a whole, inextricably meshed in the web of cosmic design. For Marxists to accept that the dialectic is of a universal order is to be committed to the same assumptions. While they may call themselves materialists, their materialism is identical with the Hegelian absolute. Hegel's dialectic was the externalisation of a self-generating creative process and hence the dialectical characters of natural laws were exemplifications of it. To endow matter with the same creative and mystical properties as have the Communists is to make it "holy matter" indeed.

Hegel claimed to have discovered a cosmic principle of development. The dialectical materialists also lay claim to this pale and privileged truth. Hegel could not, however, give us any detailed mechanism of this operation. While his evolutionary idealism propounded a logical, strictly deterministic order of things—one might even say pre-deterministic—he could not say when or how it would occur. Hegel's philosophy itself was an historical product and a logical sequence to Kant and Fichte—just as his encyclopædic knowledge which so copiously furnished illustrations for his account of the march of the absolute was derived from the culture of his time.

Because Hegel's philosophy claimed to be the expounding of the Absolute Ideal progressively revealing itself, he could not only claim the certainty of its truth in the past but could even assume as a fact its certainty in the future. Certainly a Pickwickian demonstration of the establishment of truth! Not only did Hegel believe what he wanted to believe, but he regarded what he set out to demonstrate as proven even before he began.

Hegel warned us, however, that his philosophy was not grounded in short-term predictions or even long-term—only very, very long term predictions. While it could pontificate on the past, it could make no pronouncements on the future. Hegel's truths were "revealed" truths; hence, their place and significance in the logical and necessary order of being could not be determined until the revelation had taken place. This philosophy, which saw stages of determinate being as stages of absolute mind, also saw philosophy as a thinking activity, or more precisely as a thinking after activity. Its purpose was not to influence events but to elucidate them in the light of the logically developing whole. Philosophy, *vide* Hegel, toils not neither does it spin. Its sole function is to understand. Like a Bride of Christ, it yields no earthly fruit. A barren philosophy indeed.

Actually Hegel's philosophy is a series of



logical propositions and his proof merely formal. Hegel was inspired by Fichte's quest for a universal principle which sought to contain implicit within itself the whole choir of heaven and earth. Now, Hegel claimed that his proposition was the beginning of all beginnings. It starts with Being, considered as undifferentiated and indeterminate: Being divested of its particularity and uniqueness. It is pure Being and hence it is nothing. Thus Being considered as a pure abstraction is by itself nothing, but when the two conjoin a third concept is engendered—Becoming. But this is again devoid of content and dualistic in concept unless it involves its opposite and yet complement—ceasing to be. And so out of these ghostly categories is conjugated the eternally spiral-like process—thesis, anti-thesis, synthesis. Truly a mystical triangle or a dialectical Holy Trinity.

Hegel's self-existent realm of being is, then, a realm of a timeless logical order of events. It is God or the Absolute, undergoing self-alienation *via* a process of logical activity. Actually, it is the old philosophical game of deducing existence. Hegel's procedure was to take the here and concrete and convert them into manifestations of his logical concepts or categories. After that it was mere child's play to demonstrate that all events were an externalisation of the Absolute Idea, *i.e.*, those categories considered collectively.

That Hegel had enormous erudition and penetrating insight into matters social and historical few will deny. It was the rich variety of his knowledge which gave content to his theory of a self-developing cosmic evolution in which the categories grow out of each other, and so gave some semblance of plausibility to his claim that he was also giving an authentic version of the concrete and empirical. What Hegel perhaps vaguely sought to achieve was a coherent account of the principle of continuous development, but the metaphysical cast which he gave it prevented him from doing so in any clear and consistent fashion.

Nevertheless, Hegel pioneered a new way of looking at things by breaking with the traditional thought which sees everything in the static context of an either-or situation. He showed that the study of phenomena in their movement and development can be fruitful. He also broke the spell of eighteenth century materialism, which made thought an abstract faculty, and showed its active role. This concept of the active character of consciousness is, in my view, the only debt which Hegel places Marx under. For Hegel, however, the notion of development in complexity was constrained by his own assumption which saw change as the form in which an unchanging absolute manifested itself. Again, Hegel—and here Engels follows him—never made clear what is precisely meant by "contradictions" and opposites; those to which they refer are not only of many different kinds but also quite arbitrarily constructed. While Hegel and Engels from their respective standpoints

attempted to demonstrate the universality of the dialectic, both were forced to resort to highly selective and even dubious instances. These, among other things, can be gone into in an article on Engel's views.

In so far as the claim is made by Engels that the dialectic is the science of the most general laws of development, this has already been shown to have no justification. In so far as the dialectic claims any relationship with science, it merely seeks to summarise in quaint and ambiguous language certain scientific findings. The claim made in one sixth of the world that the dialectic is the science of the sciences has its roots in politics, not in science. Just as the claim made by certain scientists (pro-Russian) that Engels in *Dialectics of Nature* anticipated the findings of modern physics, not to mention the Theory of Relativity, must have provoked a titter of scientific laughter from physicists all over the world.

One might ask: but what of the dialectical method of Hegel, as distinct from his system? The answer is that system and method are inseparable in his philosophy. What method Hegel might have had was a prisoner in the cage of the Absolute, and its only function along with his system was to keep going the interminable treadmill of the negation of the negation.

To put it another way, Hegel's system by its very assumptions made any application of method impossible, not only for specific problems but even for *any* finite purpose. Hegel, as has been seen, constructed a concept of reality which was a process of immanent creation and therefore his method (if such it could be called) was but the means by which the Absolute achieved its infinite ends. Thus for Hegel everything was a logical integrated whole. Every aspect of a situation was in some way or other involved in all other aspects. This can only mean that to know anything adequately we must know everything adequately. Systematic investigation of any particular phenomenon is, on such assumptions, out of the question. This is the fatal defect of Evans's process-theory, where every aspect is a facet of everything else.

To say, as has been said, that the dialectic is a scientific method, is to say it uses the same disciplines and procedures as science. One can only ask where and when has this happened. Again, to claim that it has universal application as a scientific procedure is a claim not made by science because scientific thinking recognises that there are whole fields of activity not amenable to scientific method—and they may never be. My own view is that Marx himself, although he coquetted with Hegelian terminology and even avowed himself a pupil of Hegel, always deemed the dialectic and scientific method as synonymous terms. That he employed the term "dialectical" often instead of "scientific" was, I think, part of the current usage of the term. Marx, I am convinced, held that scientific method was the legitimate method for investigating

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## PARTY NOTES

### HEAD OFFICE

is now open every weekday from 10 till 3, and on Tuesdays from 10 until everyone goes home at night. The shop is open and literature on sale, and members will be interested to know that already several people have come in to make enquiries and buy literature.

### EDUCATION CLASSES

begin on Friday, May 11th and continue every Friday at 7.30 and every Sunday at 2.30 until the end of June, when there will be a holiday recess until the end of September. The first sessions will be *Methods of Study*, followed by *Ancient Civilizations* and *Feudalism*, with Comrades Hardy, Read and Phillips as tutors. Outlines of study for these classes will be published in FORUM.

### THE NEXT ISSUE

of FORUM from January, 1954 to April, 1955 are now available from the Book Department at 10/-. A few additional copies of the first volume will also be available shortly. Copies of the index alone may be obtained at a small charge.

### BOUND VOLUMES

of FORUM will contain study-outlines (referred to above), the second article on "Do We Need the Dialectic?" and a Socialist's account of recent elections in Austria. There will also be a review of two publications dealing with religion—Rosa Luxemburg's *Socialism and the Churches* and the new Penguin *Communism and Christianity*, by Martin D'Arcy.

### CONTRIBUTIONS TO FORUM

should be addressed to the Internal Party Journal Committee, at Head Office. If they cannot be typed, articles should be written in ink on one side of the paper only, and contributors are asked to give their addresses and the names of their Branches. Contributors intending series of articles should give an indication of the scope of their series, not send merely a first article.

natural and social phenomena. It may not be able to acquire all knowledge, but it can acquire worthwhile knowledge.

To end on a metaphor, we can regard Hegel's system as a philosophical sandwich comprising two layers of Nothing (pure being) with a spicy flavour of Something in between. This may be food for the gods but it is no diet for us mortals.

E.W.

E.W.'s next article will deal with Engels's "Anti-Duhring" and "Dialectics of Nature."



## MARXISM and LITERATURE: 8

Educationists often say that people need to be taught the reading habit. The sight of any newsagent's shop, festooned with paper publications, is enough to prove them wrong: in fact, most people have the reading habit only too badly, an afflicting hunger for anything at all in print. It began in the nineteenth century. The 'forties and 'fifties spawned novels, pamphlets, magazines, broadsheets, reprints in fantastic profusion. This even though a quarter of the population—according to an estimate in 1850—could neither read nor write (in 1842, Parliament allowed £30,000 for education and £70,000 for Royal Stables and Royal Dog Kennels).

The flood of Victorian literature can be drawn into five main streams, which shall be termed Informational, Realistic, Aesthetic, Definitely for the Upper Orders and Definitely for the Lower Orders. Such a division can only be a rough one. It excludes such minor masterpieces as *The Way of All Flesh* and Fitzgerald's rendering of Omar Khayyam—both expressions of nineteenth-century rationalism. It excludes, too, the theatre: scarcely an exclusion because there was nothing at all worth speaking of until the last fifth of the century. The rewards of literature were in fiction-writing now, and the stage was given to melodrama, opera, third-rate farce and living statuary.

The supreme deity of the well-to-do was Alfred, Lord Tennyson, pillar of the empire, idealizer of everything from what Ford Madox Ford calls "the sub-nauseating sissiness" of *Idylls of the King* to the supra-nauseating heroics of—

"Theirs not to reason why,  
Theirs but to do or die."

In Tennyson you find the voice of nineteenth-century Liberalism; afraid of revolution, contemptuous of democracy, reassuring himself and the readers that God was in heaven and all right with the world. The *Fortnightly Review* paid Tennyson £20,000 for a single poem; £20,000, that is, for saying much what John Bright had said when he prophesied that the British Empire would shake and prosperity depart from England on the day when child-labour was forbidden in the mines.

Along with Tennyson there were Matthew Arnold and Browning preaching the upper-class gospels of, respectively, "culture" and individualism. With all his verbal pyrotechnics Browning said only the same as Longfellow—that Life was real, Life was earnest, and the others had better put their shoulders to the wheel. It was a kindlier, more effervescent version of Carlyle's

doctrine of work and the supremacy of the individual. For all the acceptability of such sentiments, these were not the best-sellers of the age, however. Poetry, like drama, was a victim (and never recovered) of the rise of popular fiction; in 1843 Moxon, the poets' leading publisher, turned down a volume by Elizabeth Barrett because only Tennyson was bringing a profit.

The biggest sellers, in fact, were the tomes of knowledge. Macaulay's *History of England*, Grote's *History of Greece*, Ruskin's *Modern Painters*; Henry Layard's *Nineveh and Its Remains*; heavy works by the dozen—scientific, historical, philosophical, archaeological. And, while undoubtedly they were works of scholarship, it is safe to say (because it still happens) that they were bought for display and as acquisitions for the oak-panelled library quite as often as they were bought to read.

The most avid readers of serious informational stuff were working men. They formed and ran their own night schools, libraries and Mutual Improvement Associations: in 1850 there were 700 Mechanics' Institutes with a total membership of 107,000. Smiles's *Self-Help* may be a joke to-day, but in the mid-nineteenth century it was the inspiration of countless working men who believed, as Smiles told one of the Mutual Improvement societies, "that man can triumph over circumstances and subject them to his will; that knowledge is no exclusive inheritance of the rich and leisured classes, but may be attained by all . . ." The didactic *Penny Magazine* sold 200,000 copies a time at its peak; the *Penny Cyclopædia*, *Half-Hours with the Best Authors* and *Information for the People* were similarly popular. Underlying their instructiveness, of course, was the injunction to work and be contented; nevertheless, they were meeting a real and continuous hunger for knowledge—and helping in the production of the self-educated working man who built the trade union movement in the nineteenth century.

The growth and spread of knowledge were part of the developing complexity of industrial capitalism. Just as technical progress compelled fresh advances in mathematical and scientific thought, the opening of new territory—whether far-flung bits of empire or cuttings for the Great Eastern Railway—fertilized zoology, geology and archaeology. The publications of Lyell's *Principles of Geology*, Chambers' *Vestiges of Creation*, McLennan's *Patriarchal Family* and, of course, *The Origin of Species* were blows from which religious fundamentalism was never to recover. True, the other side

"In every historical epoch, the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange, and the social organization necessarily following from it, form the basis upon which is built up, and from which alone can be explained, the political and intellectual history of that epoch."  
MARX.

had its moments—Layard's *Nineveh* was a comforting demonstration of biblical history, for example. But it was difficult to sustain belief in an act of creation four thousand years old when the excavation for every new canal and bridge was yielding fresh testimony of man's antiquity.

Thus, as industrialism changed the solid, visible environment, its concomitant of knowledge and informed, scientific thinking changed that other vital element, the climate of ideas. For the writer there was a further, strictly economic consideration: the upper class no longer needed him. Until the nineteenth century he had provided their recreation, mirrored their life, standardized their ethics. Now he was a producer for the market. If he was a poet the market would not keep him—Tennyson and his like were private-income men. If a fiction-writer he had to please the reading public, which meant either the cream-biscuit middle-class library addicts or the blood-and-kisses magazine readers. In painting, the situation was much the same. Once it had become clear that art was for money's sake, the reaction was inevitable: art for art's sake.

It began in France where, in the thirties and forties, writers, artists or musicians had no place of any sort. The Revolution had seen off the aristocrats who might have been patrons, leaving the small bourgeoisie the backbone of the nation; and to them, money-grubbing traders to a man, artists had no useful function to serve. Some artists responded by direct attack: Daumier poured out cartoons and lithographs in which the bourgeois was depicted as low, vicious, ugly and mean. Others took it further, however. Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin* was an onslaught on the utilitarian bourgeois and all his properties, proclaiming uselessness as the apex of art. Murger's *Scenes de la Vie de Boheme* made romance of artistic indigence and virtue of irresponsibility. And finally there were Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal*—the Flowers of Evil—and Huysmans' *A Rebours*—Against the Grain: studies in perversity and artificiality, enshrining art as something apart from and opposed to the ordinary concerns of men.

"Decadence," as they called it, made less headway in Britain partly because conditions were not quite the same, partly because the reaction against commercialism and vulgar wealth had led another way to the idealism of the Pre-Raphaelites, Ruskin and William Morris. It had its day in the eighteen-nineties and produced its idols, most of whom can be seen across sixty years as people with little to say. The aesthetic



movement was all form, with no content under the jewelled, precious verbiage. As, indeed, it was bound to be by definition, by its attempted setting-apart of "aesthetics" from other kinds of thought and activity.

Gautier, Wilde and Beardsley made a wicked word of "aesthetic"; at its real value, it refers to the question of perception by the senses—that is, to personal appreciations and judgments which ultimately are social judgments. The "sense of beauty . . . the highest sense of which a human being can be capable" that Wilde spoke about was, and is, a simple piece of social consciousness. Only one of Wilde's contemporaries saw that *The Picture of Dorian Grey* was a work with "a very plain moral, pushed home, to the effect that vice and crime make people coarse and ugly."

Realistic writing about social life—from whatever standpoint—was a near-automatic product of nineteenth-century conditions. Dickens made his attacks on abuses in the early years of the Victorian era, in the first dark flush of capitalism's heyday; Zola came later, using the simple method of every nineteenth-century scientist—the accumulation of inescapable evidence. It is common knowledge that the Catholic Church put Zola's works on the *Index Expurgatorius*, and less well known that W. H. Smith's did something similar. Devotees of what is called "powerful writing" (which includes the muck-raking of Upton Sinclair as well as the eye-gouging of Mickey Spillane) should read *Germinal* and see how a real writer does it. Alex Comfort says in *The Novel and Our Time*:

"Genuine power, as exemplified in Zola or Flaubert, is almost wholly a matter of dramatic sense, creative use of imagery, and imaginative detail. The bed of white china asters in *Le Debacle*, which is progressively turned to red by buckets of bloodstained water from the dressing-post, is worth volumes of electrically-charged language. The spurious techniques of securing power are the hard-boiled attitude, the use of telegraphese, and the evocation of sadistic imagery in the audience. The power of handling violent events is essential if one is going to write about modern Europe at all. But a sequence of violent events presented uncritically and without form, and interlarded with 'buggers' and 'bastards' to startle the Citizens, is a product of violence, not a comment on it."

A partial reason why no English writer of the time comes near Zola or measures up to Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* is that a more rigid morality dictated narrower limits of theme and treatment. The theme, for instance, of *Nana*—the soft-bodied, sensual trollop who centres and symbolizes the corruption of Paris before 1870—would have been unrepresentable if it had been conceivable to an English author. Woman as she was visualized by the English middle class a hundred years ago is in this word-picture by the encyclopaedic Dr. Chambers:

"Her favourite seat is under a laburnum, which seems to be showering a new birth of beauty upon her head. There she sits in the quiet of nature, thinking thoughts as beautiful as flowers, with feelings as gentle as the gales which fan them. She knows no evil, and therefore she does none. Untouched by earthly experiences, she is perfectly happy—and the happy are good."

(*The English Girl*).

Thus, Maupassant's acid, to-the-life pictures of foolishness and corruptness were marked as being characteristically French; a somewhat unfair judgment, for the "naturalistic" writers of Germany were much more vigorous in exposing sexual irregularities. Nevertheless, there was a small group of English novelists towards the end of the nineteenth century who made their concern the description—sometimes autobiographical—of how the poor lived. Morrison's *Tales of Mean Streets* and William Hale White's *Revolution in Tanner's Lane* may have a "pi" sound now, but they were important works in their day and their popularity a symptom of the changing social temper which was to produce Charles Booth's survey of the conditions of the London poor. And there was George Gissing, almost a smaller, humbler Zola, chronicling poverty and sombreness in *New Grub Street* and *The Unclassed*; and at the same time in Germany, Gerhard Hauptmann doing the same thing with greater indignation.

Popularity is a relative word, of course. The most widely-read writers of to-day are Maysie Grieg, Elizabeth Hoy and Molly Seymour: unheard-of in literary circles, but known to everyone who buys a woman's magazine. Similarly, a hundred years ago the most prolific and popular of all writers were Eliza Cook, G. W. Reynolds and James Rymer. They were the doyens of the magazine world. Eliza Cook specialized in sentimental verse like—

"I love it, I love it, and who shall dare  
To chide me for loving that old arm-  
chair?"

Her magazine sold 50,000 a week, its main feature being Eliza's verse—her prose, too, doling out the same opiate philosophy.

Reynolds' writings were called by Dickens "a national reproach." His industry was stupendous—serial after serial, making at least sixty full-length works of fiction, mostly published under his own editorship (*Reynolds' News* was his foundation). His great work was *The Mysteries of London*, a monumental compendium, in the words of an American commentator, of "murders, seductions, rapes, bordello experiences, gambling hells, boozing dens, dens of horrors, executions, body snatchers, suicides galore." Reynolds was a militant Chartist; his heroines were always innocent working

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## Quotation

### LAST REFUGE

Twice in your leading article in last Wednesday's paper there occur the words British cowardice. One wonders what is the nationality of the man who wrote it, as the combination of these two words, together, is unknown in the English language.

(Letter to *News Chronicle*,  
quoted in *This England*, 1933).

In commemoration of Victory Day I hereby order: That a salute of twenty artillery salvoes be fired to-day, May 9th, in Moscow, the capital of our country, and in the capitals of the Union Republics and in the Hero Cities of Leningrad, Stalingrad, Sevastopol and Odessa.

Eternal glory to the heroes who fell in battle for the freedom and independence of our country!

Long live the great Soviet people!

Long live the Soviet armed forces, covered with glory by their historic victories!

Glory to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union—the inspirer and organiser of all our victories!

(Marshall Zhukov's Order of  
the Day, May 9th, 1956).

When I notice the following facts: (1) that I have an instinctive feeling of superiority to Herr Schmidt because I was born of English parents in Kensington and he was born of German parents in Berlin; (2) that Herr Schmidt has an instinctive feeling of superiority to me because he was born in Berlin of German parents and I was born in Kensington of English parents; (3) that our mutual feeling of superiority would have been just the same if I had been born in Berlin and he had been born in Kensington—when I notice these three facts, I am reluctantly forced to conclude that our belief in superiority is a mutual delusion.

Savage society accepts and encourages this delusion; its institutions are built upon it, and it is the very fabric of politics and social relations.

(Leonard Woolf in *Quack, Quack!*)

girls, dragged to death and worse by black-hearted baronets and financiers.

All that, in the eighteen-forties and fifties, was but the preliminary outpour of pulp. The real flood was to come in the eighties and nineties, after the working class had begun to be brought down to the level of the upper class by the Education Acts.

R. COSTER.



## WILLIAM FAULKNER

This series of articles is meant to be an introduction to some novelists of this century and their work, through socialist eyes. This is not to say that some, or even any, novelists write from a socialist point of view, but it is no coincidence that the problems of capitalism which the socialist is most concerned with are often written about by modern novelists to great effect.

As Coster has pointed out in his articles on Marxism and Literature, the economic background and social circumstances explain to a large extent the nature and content of the literature of the time, and literature, in its turn, tells us much about the society of the period. For this reason there is much to be gained from a study of the novel, as one's insight into the thoughts and feelings of the people of their respective periods depends largely upon the novels, plays and stories of the time.

It is perhaps in the United States that the twentieth-century novel has had its most prolific flowering, so perhaps that would be the best place to commence our survey.

William Faulkner is a novelist who has achieved a certain amount of fame (and criticism) in our day. He was born in Mississippi in 1897 and, after working in a bank as a young man, became in turn a lieutenant in the air force, a farm worker, a coal heaver, a crew member of a fishing trawler, a newspaper reporter, a deck-hand, and eventually settled down on a farm in Mississippi.

He has written a number of novels, the majority of them dealing with "The South," those troubled states below the Mason-Dixon line that contain a large negro minority. It is not perhaps, the South of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or *Tales of Judge Priest* but it is certainly the South of *Scottsboro' Boy* and of reality, a seething cauldron of humanity which has erupted at various times into lynching parties; prison riots; race murders; and the Ku Klux Klan, in addition to the other problems of capitalism that we know so well—unemployment, poverty and disease. Faulkner portrays these problems and evils in vivid colours in his novels and deals with them with absolute sincerity and with tremendous power and conviction.

Faulkner has, however, the desire to express himself in a more vivid manner than straightforward prose allows him, and accordingly he has experimented in various ways in his novels. For instance, his latest novel, *Requiem for a Nun*, which is an extremely fine story of a Negress who is executed for the murder of a white baby, contains between the chapters of the story itself large amounts of "abstract" prose

which veers between clearness and downright incomprehensibility.

His first novel, *Soldier's Pay*, is written in a clear straightforward prose style that has considerable impact. It is a story of soldiers demobilised after the 1914-18 war, and their struggle to get adjusted to the changed world around them. This novel probably represents the best introduction to Faulkner's work.

Perhaps his most well-known novel is *Sanctuary* (published in Penguins) which deals with a group of criminals, misfits and mentally deranged people living in the deep South. A white girl is raped and a negro murdered, and an innocent man is tried and found guilty of the two crimes (due to the evidence given by the raped girl) and eventually dragged from the gaol and burned by the mob. In this novel Faulkner almost makes the reader feel the experiences of his characters and, in the dialogue and particularly in the tortured thoughts of the lawyer who is defending the accused, one can see Faulkner's deep insight into the social problems of the South.

Again in *The Sound and the Fury* there appears this insight and compassion for humanity. It is a story of a depressed Southern white family with negro servants whose members struggle along in an ever-growing sea of problems. This novel contains some of Faulkner's most successful experiments in "impressionist" writing, part of the text representing the thoughts of an inarticulate feeble-minded member of the family. Another novel, *Intruder in the Dust* (filmed by M.G.M. in 1949) tells of an old negro who is arrested for a murder of which he is innocent, and the attempts of a white lawyer and an old white woman to exonerate him. This novel throws light on the colour problem and also deals with the kind of life that is led by a number of the white farmers in the South, and the poverty both of their means of living and their thinking.

A number of the novels, such as *Sanctuary*, *Requiem for a Nun*, *Sartoris*, and others, and also many of the short stories are set in the same locale, "Yoknapatawpha Country," and the plots and the characters are often interwoven. Not all of Faulkner's novels are in this setting however, or even in the South. One of his novels, *Pylon*, describes the miserable existence of the pilots and mechanics of "air-circuses" in the 'thirties and is written from the point of view of a physically emaciated and mentally unstable newspaper reporter. As in a number of the novels, the story ends in tragedy, but there is no doubt that, as with all of Faulkner's writing, it was written to stimulate and to

make the reader wonder about humanity and its evils and capabilities.

William Faulkner has expressed the purpose behind his writings in his speech of acceptance for the Nobel Prize for literature in 1949. He described his writing as being "a life's work in the agony and sweat of the human spirit, not for glory and least of all for profit, but to create out of the materials of the human spirit something which did not exist before." Whilst it cannot be suggested that Faulkner is a socialist, it is obvious nevertheless that his approach to mankind is constructive, and at some points similar to the socialist's own.

The main fault in the general trend of Faulkner's thought, if one can pick out a general trend, is his somewhat narrow parochialism. He is still infected with the ideology of the "homogeneous South" that should have disappeared with General Lee's surrender. He seems to want to turn the clock back to those chivalrous slave-ridden days that were irrevocably lost when Fort Sumpter was fired upon in 1861.

He is, first and foremost, a Southerner, and his convictions are so bound up with the pre-Civil War mentality of the South that he has gone so far as to state that he would be prepared to fight against the North in another civil war if the Southerner's rights were threatened. In a remarkable interview with the *Sunday Times* (4/3/56), Faulkner said: "I grant you that it is bad that there should be a minority people who because of their colour don't have a right to social equality and to justice. But it is bad that Americans should be fighting Americans. That is what will happen, because the Southern whites are back in the spirit of 1860. There could easily be another civil war and the South would be whipped again."

Edmund Wilson, in an admirable essay, "William Faulkner and the Civil Rights Program," dealing with this aspect of Faulkner's writing, pointed out that however much faith Faulkner placed in the Southern "Liberals," it is to a large extent the outside pressure of Northern opinion that forces the South to think seriously about the negro problem. Faulkner however, looks upon the problem in a different light. He regards John Brown, the Civil War, and the Supreme Court decision on segregated schools as retrograde steps so far as the Negroes are concerned. The bitterness and racial intolerance aroused by reconstruction after the civil war will be equalled, he would say, by the bitterness aroused by the Court's decision. He can see the evils of the colour problem (and indeed, his novels contain



sympathetic and stimulating treatment of the subject) but he insists that if bitterness, bloodshed, and race-riots are to be avoided, the South must be left to find its own solution, and not have ready-made solutions imposed on them by the North.

At least Faulkner can see quite clearly the economic basis of the problem—"To produce cotton we have a system of peonage. That is absolutely what is at the bottom of the situation. I would say that a planter who has a thousand acres wants to keep the Negro in a position of debt-peonage and to do it he is going to violate his daughter. But all he wants at the back of it is a system of peonage to produce his cotton at the highest rate of profit." What he cannot see is that the movement against race-prejudice has an equally economic background. If because of labour-shortage, Negroes are employed in skilled jobs in factories on an equal footing with white workers, then race-prejudice must tend to break down. South Africa is a case in point. The feudal Boer farmer and their allies are attempting to keep the coloured people subjugated, whereas the capitalists are using their influence to end segregation (not from any liberal convictions but from necessity), and if South Africa is to become an efficient capitalist nation, it will be the anti-segregation group that will win out.

In fact it is capitalism itself which at appropriate periods breaks down the barrier, and not the efforts of liberal-minded whites, North or South. The Civil War was caused through the South's refusal to recognise realities and see that as far as the United States was concerned, Northern capitalist industry was the norm and dominant influence, and the feudal Southern cotton plantations were outmoded. The present trouble springs from the same sort of ideology, the Southern whites this time refusing to accept that capitalism needs (at least in time of boom and labour shortage) efficient unsegregated workers, black or white. Race prejudice will tend to break down with the termination of the Negroes' subjugation as a race and their general merging into the undifferentiated working class. The Supreme Court decision in essence, therefore, is not the culmination of a campaign of liberal opinion, but is merely the rubber stamp on a process that capitalism itself has brought about.

Nevertheless, this cannot detract from the high quality of Faulkner's writing and should not prevent socialists from getting a great deal of pleasure and mental profit from his work. After all, every socialist is, or should be, ready to learn more about the world in which he lives, and there is no doubt that there is something to be learnt from the works of novelists such as William Faulkner.

Recommended books:—*Soldiers' Pay*; *Sartoris*; *The Sound and The Fury*; *Sanctuary*; *Light in August*; *Pylon*; *Intruder in the Dust*; *Requiem for a Nun*; *As I Lay Dying*; *Knight's Gambit* (short stories); *Collected Stories*. A.W.I.

## SEX and SOCIALISM

In the article *Sex, Religion and Socialism* in the January-February FORUM, "Cortes" rebuts my assumptions and conclusions of November. Now, while I agree that pin-up girls are not sexual deities in the sense of meaning phallic worship, and it is true that for millions of capitalism's workers screen stars may in some way satisfy the desire for romance and sweet companionship which their drab lives cannot provide, the attraction is still a sexual one in the biological sense, however, you will like to dress it up.

It is also true that the whole paraphernalia of advertizing and publicity have built the pin-up girl into what amounts to a sex goddess. It assumes such proportions in the modern world as to amount to sex worship; unconscious if you like, but sex worship just the same. As I write, I have in front of me an advertisement for men's shirts—in which all that can be seen is a pair of female legs and the faint outline of a female form, the shirt being in process of passing over the head. The advertizer, at any rate, has no illusions about the needs of his customers.

In the world of fashion the story is the same: plunging necklines, tight skirts and sweaters, high heels, nylons, etc. What do these show if not an awareness by the fashion houses of the kind of clothing to attract attention? And the way to do that is through sexual appeal again in the biological sense. The huge sale in cosmetics and exotic perfumes with names like *Tabu*, *Great Expectations*, *Twenty-one*, *Evening in Paris*, etc., tells its own story. The theatre also has to rely on nudity to attract audiences, here again the object being to suggest sex in the biological sense; the sales of the cheap pseudo-pornographic novels, which sell through their suggestive covers rather than through their contents; all point to the exaltation of the pin-up girl.

I have been criticized for caning the Church with its own morality. I am told that if mediæval Church audiences could witness nudity on the stage with complete composure (which my critic doesn't believe) then that is one up to the Church. To which I reply that at any rate there is no evidence of their storming the stage. While it is probably true that churchgoers of that period were able to witness nudity with complete composure, it would not be true of modern churchgoers, who would probably be so incensed that they would try to burn down the theatre; which makes my point on the changing attitude of the Christian Church on sex matters and to nudity on the stage in particular.

Again, while it is true that methods of practising prostitution are not of any interest to socialists, my criticism was levelled at the

newspapers with their mock anti-vice campaigns and the importance they appear to attach to the street-walking prostitute. The cure for that problem is obviously licensed houses—but, as my critic points out, prostitution will be non-existent in socialist society.

In mentioning the thousands who turned out to watch the pin-up girl in contrast with the mere handful of people who watched the ballerina, because one conjured up sexual ideas and the other represented art pure and simple, I'm told every bishop in Britain would endorse my sentiments. Well, I don't mind agreeing with bishops about some things, and this apparently is one of them. The point here is that it was the advertizing ballyhoo which brought the people out to see the famous pin-up girl. Why didn't they go to see the ballerina, for she is equally beautiful and the show was well advertized? They didn't go because they weren't interested in what she stood for in their minds.

How has such a situation arisen? It is because the advertizers and publicity men, as well as the film-makers, theatrical impresarios, cheap novel writers and newspaper proprietors are aware of the "sales value" of sex—but why does sex sell better than anything else? The reason surely is obvious. It is because the property laws of capitalist society deny free expression of a deep-felt urge (incidentally also the cause of many nervous disorders, as well as umpteen other bodily disorders), until now it assumes an importance which amounts to sex worship.

I know that to some socialists it is heresy to forecast, however, vaguely, what Socialism will or may be like, and for this I bow my head in shame. But I think it is well to envisage Socialism, even though subsequent events may prove us wrong. What member of the Socialist Party has not, at some time or other, cast a glorious picture of the world we want? If we had not all done so, we should not be Socialists.

PHIL MELLOR.

### The "Western Socialist"

We have a deficit on the *Socialist Standard*; the W.S.P. has a bigger one on the *Western Socialist*. Members of the S.P.G.B. can help to reduce this by getting more copies sold. At present we are selling no more than 600 of each issue—it would not take too great an effort to double this. The *Western Socialist* is a magazine by Socialists about Socialism, and it deserves the biggest circulation that can be got for it.



# THE RACIAL PROBLEM

"The foundation of the Negro's economic progress is the fact that he has broken in large numbers out of domestic work into industry. During World War II, a million Negroes went into defence industries. By and large they have stayed in industry ever since. To-day nearly 11 per cent. of all U.S. industrial workers are Negroes—twice as many as in 1940. Most Negroes are still held to unskilled jobs. But there has been progress:

Among U.S. skilled workers and foremen, 4 per cent. are now Negroes, up from 2½ per cent. in 1940.

Among clerical and sales personnel, 3½ per cent. are now Negroes, up from 1 per cent. in 1940.

Among women professional and technical workers, 7 per cent. are Negroes, up from 4½ per cent. in 1940."

\* \* \*

"Some of the Cadillac prosperity is obviously false or forced; many Negroes are driven to spend their earnings in showy ways because they still cannot get the more ordinary things a white man with a similar income could buy, e.g., a decent home or a vacation trip to a good resort. Says a Negro leader in St. Louis (where Negro housing is particularly bad): 'A flashy car becomes their living room, the only one they've got.' Says a San Francisco Negro: 'It is a sort of mobile aspirin tablet.'"

\* \* \*

"From the Civil War through World War II, Negro soldiers were kept in segregated units. Despite individual bravery, their morale and performance were generally low. In World War II there were some outstanding Negro Units, but of all the Negroes in uniform (about 1,000,000), 90 per cent. were kept in rear area service outfits. During the Battle of the Bulge, when he urgently needed reinforcements, General Eisenhower put Negro service troops through a quick combat training course, attached them in platoon strength to line companies. The experiment worked: the Negro troops, more or less unsegregated for the first time, made a good combat showing. This experience became an argument for post-war integration policy."

\* \* \*

"THE MACHINE. It was fashionable in the '20's and '30's, particularly among pink-eyed young economists, to say that the

machine degraded man. Actually, it has proved a great equalizer. It tests a man coldly and without prejudice; he can either run it or he cannot. North and South, thousands of Negroes are experiencing equality for the first time in their lives—the equality of doing exactly the same work as whites on the assembly line."

"Telephone companies in the North, all white until a few years ago, now employ 5,000 Negroes.

Denver now employs Negro bus drivers (long since a fixture in New York and Chicago).

Detroit banks, in white neighbourhoods, employ Negro tellers.

Many Northern department stores hire Negro production workers."

\* \* \*

"A Negro may give a white panhandler a handout but he may not follow him into a bar with the sign 'whites only.' He may attend the graduate schools of state universities (about 1,000 do), but he may not attend undergraduate colleges—with some exceptions (e.g., University of Louisville, University of Delaware). In such schools Negro and white students get on without friction, and form friendships; but the Negroes, while they eat with whites, may not belong to white fraternities—but they are allowed to attend dances as guests."

\* \* \*

"Mob violence is rare. The year 1952 was the first without a single reported lynching."

At the Co-op. Hall,  
197 Mare Street, Hackney,  
on  
Mondays, at 8 p.m.

May 7th E. HARDY  
INFLATION: ITS EFFECT  
UPON EMPLOYMENT.

May 14th P. LAWRENCE  
THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV.

May 28th E. HARDY  
INFLATION AND OTHER  
CAUSES OF HIGH PRICES.

"Perhaps the Negro's most serious problem is that, as he gets more of the fruits of the tree of life, his appetite increases. Explains a Manhattan Negro social worker: 'A Negro labourer living in Harlem and rarely peering beyond the boundaries of his ghetto might be reasonably content; but if he gets a good joy downtown, mixes with white people on a more or less equal basis, and then in the evening is forced to go home to a miserable house in Harlem, he will be bitterly discontented.' Says a Negro philosopher, Dr. Alain Locke of Howard University: 'The old slum is no longer the problem. It's the new, respectable slum that worries us. We call it Striver's Row.' As Negroes move into Striver's Row, their bitterness at remaining inequalities will mount. At the same time, white resentment of growing Negro ambition may mount too."

\* \* \*

"That the majority of white voters participated in achieving these gains does not mean that the Negro's progress has been merely the result of enlightened white social attitudes. They rest on a much more solid foundation—the increasing political effectiveness of the Negro himself."

\* \* \*

"A Hundred Years of Progress . . . . . March 1st, 1875. Congress, in an Act subsequently nullified by the Courts, passes Civil Rights Law guaranteeing all persons, regardless of race, the use of 'inns, public conveyances on land or water, theatres and other places of amusement' . . . . .

June 2nd, 1953. The Supreme Court ruled that the District of Columbia restaurants may not legally refuse to serve Negroes, ending a segregation practice that has prevailed since Civil War days."

(From *The American Negro To-day*, published by the United States Information Service).

\* \* \*

"By 1953, all but five of the Southern State universities had begun to admit Negroes. These five were the universities of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, and South Carolina. (This week's disturbance at the University of Alabama followed the admission of its first Negro student).

(From letter published by United States Information Service, February, 9th, 1956).